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PIER VITTORIO AURELI, *ARCHITECTURE AND ABSTRACTION*, THE MIT PRESS, CAMBRIDGE, MASS., 2023.

This book strives to situate abstraction within the broader socio-political context of architecture. For Pier Vittorio Aureli, abstraction is an endeavor to translate space into a generic framework akin to language, and could be a manifestation of power exerted over labor, beings, and space. While helping to maintain architects' authority during the Renaissance, abstraction transformed into a means of calculating and controlling surplus value across different historical periods, even weakening the architect's status.

Pier Vittorio Aureli defines a plan as an abstraction of the building, and claims that planning is not a consequence but a "political precondition" of architecture manifesting power. The abstraction of architectural drawing, which was a response to the conflicts at the construction site, ended in the birth of the "modern" architect. In this context, Leon Battista Alberti's efforts to codify drawing by prioritizing mathematical perspective resulted in the abstraction of architecture into orthogonal projections. Aureli reminds us that the term "design," emerging in the 16th century from the Italian *disegno*, encompasses a broader concept than the graphic aspect of drawing. The definition of design as a conceptual entity or activity contributed to dismantling the traditional integration of head and hand as a characteristic of medieval craftsmanship.

The book also investigates the historical transformation of the grid as the most prevailing tool for spatial organization. Questioning the conventional understanding of the grid as a rational system, Aureli underscores its role in the violence inherent in the process of land appropriation and the alteration of land into "abstract property." Abstraction elevated the

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grid from a mere physical order to a social apparatus governing human relationships with land and each other. The grid's uniformity, orchestrated by institutions of power, facilitated state control over the labor force. These grids also served as an instrument for enforcing legal rights to property grounded in the principle of private ownership.

The book also offers discussions that revolve around the terms “form” and “space” and their interconnection with aesthetic perception, particularly in the Kantian sense. Within this framework, “form is not the image of things but the process through which we understand things.”¹ Formalism, which gained dominance in the 19th century, gave the illusion of the possibility of a disinterested cultural experience. The conventional understanding of abstraction in art and architecture, influenced by this formalism, detaches the experience of form from social and political issues.

According to Aureli, even constructivism, born after the October Revolution, while criticizing artistic autonomy, borrowed methods from formalists. On this matter, the book discusses the Vkhutemas school's program and its course on “form,” highlighting how teachers like Nikolai Ladovsky influenced the constructivist idea of “construction” in contrast to composition as a “traditional process of art-making, which presupposed a play with form completely divorced from social and material condition.”² In this context, architecture is seen as a tool for organizing social relationships rather than artistic expression.

The book also discusses how, in the transition from the 18th to 19th century, industrialization affected architectural design. During this period, the abstraction of architectural form aligned with the prevailing mode of production. Aureli links this abstraction to the logic of industrialized spaces like factories and the architect's response to this challenge, an example of which would be Le Corbusier's Dom-INO house, a space that erodes genuine experience. Nevertheless, Aureli concludes that “once the abstraction of architecture is unplugged from the logic of capitalist accumulation, it can become the most appropriate form of socialist life.”³

The most captivating aspect of *Architecture and Abstraction* lies in its power to arouse myriad questions concerning alternative ways to read architecture in relation to production/reproduction. Pier Vittorio Aureli

¹ P. V. Aureli, *Architecture and Abstraction*, p. 167.

² *Ibid.*, p. 181.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

connects his positions with various philosophical discourses and thinkers such as Karl Marx, Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault, and Manfredo Tafuri. This book can be viewed as a discerning response challenging the interpretation of abstraction in the history and theory of architecture. *Architecture and Abstraction* has opened a new theoretical venue for scholars into the history of architecture and indeed holds the promise of significantly impacting future studies in the discipline.